JOHN PAUL JONES'S GREATEST FIGHT.

By the Rev. Cyrus Townsend Brady.

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ON the evening of Thursday, Sept. 23, 1779, a rather small, brown-faced, dark-haired man, about thirty-two years of age, and of a melancholy, poetic, and even scholarly, cast of countenance, clad in a blue naval uniform, stood on the weather side of the high poop-deck of a large warship, looking keenly about him with his bright, brilliant black eyes. Sometimes his glance fell meditatively upon two gallant white ships under full sail, men-of-war evidently, which were slowly crossing his course at a right angle a mile or two ahead of him, and making in toward the not distant land the while. Anon, with thoughtful vision, he surveyed the crowded decks before and beneath him; the rude, motley men, half naked and armed with cutlass or pike and pistol, who were grouped about the grim, great guns protruding menacingly through the open ports; the old gun captains squinting along the breech and blowing their smoking matches while looking to the priming of the guns; the little groups of pig-tailed veterans, sail-trimmers, assembled about the masts; the brilliantly uniformed soldiers, or marines, in the scarlet and white of France; the agile topmen hanging in great human clusters over the broad tops above his head. Sometimes he turned about and swept the sea behind him with his eager gaze, frowning in high displeasure at what he saw.

The soft light of the setting sun streamed over the larboard quarter and threw into high relief the lonely figure on the weather side of the ship. Seamanship spoke in the careless yet confident poise of the well-knit, muscular figure, as he unconsciously balanced himself and easily met the roll of the ship in the sea; intelligence and kindness sparkled in his eyes; power and force were instinct in every line of his aggressive person, and determination evidenced itself in the compressed lip, the firm, resolute mouth, and the tightly closed hand which hung easily by his side. The gentle breeze of the evening tenderly and softly fell on the worn sails of the ancient ship, swelling the soiled and weather-beaten cloths of canvas out in graceful, tremulous curves as if in caress, as she swept slowly toward the enemy. The ripple of the waves clinging about her cut-water alone broke the silence. The scene was as peaceful and as quiet as if the loud calling of the drum, which had so lately re-echoed along the decks, had been an invitation to church service instead of a stern summons to quarters for action. A faint smell of balm and spicery which clung about the ship, a reminder of her distant voyages in Eastern seas, was like incense to the soul.

Off toward the side of the sinking sun rose the bold shore of England. Flamborough headland, crowned by a lofty tower already sending a broad beam of warning light out over the waters to voyaging mariners, thrust out a salient wedge of massive, rock-bound coast in rude, wave-piercing angle through the tossing sea. To the east the full moon, already some hours high, shot the soft silver of her rays, mingled with the fading gold of the dying day, over the pallid ocean. At this moment the mellow tones of the ship's bell forward striking three couplets in quick succession awakened the commander from the reveries in which he had been indulging, and he turned to find his first lieutenant mounting the poop-deck ladder to report the ship clear for action. The dark, expressive eye of the captain lingered affectionately upon the form of the lithe, bright-eyed, honest and able young subordinate, who had yet to see his twenty-fourth birthday. Between the two officers subsisted the fullest confidence and the deepest affection.

Who was the lonely captain? The greatest novelist of England calls him a traitor. One of the most prominent naval authorities of to-day, from the same proud nation, describes him as a blackguard. Popular feeling among his contemporary enemies considered him as neither more nor less than a bloodthirsty, murdering pirate. The captain of the ship which he was about to conquer is reputed to have most ungraciously expressed his regret at having been compelled "to surrender to a man who fought with a halter around his neck." But the people who made and loved the flag, the Stars and Stripes, which fluttered above his head, and gave it a high place in the glorious blazonry of nations, told a different tale. The admiration of Washington, the incorruptible soldier and leader; the beloved of Franklin, the discerning statesman and philosopher; the friend of Robert Morris, the brilliant financier and patriot—John Paul Jones, the son of a poor Scotch gardener, who had left his native land in infancy and who had been brought up with the scanty advantages afforded by a life passed from childhood upon the sea, rose, against every sort of discouragement, by sheer merit alone, to be the greatest figure in the naval history of his adopted country for nearly a hundred years. By his indefatigable resolution and unsurpassable valor, his wonderful technical skill and fascinating personality, he became a chevalier of France, an admiral of Russia, the friend at once of two queens—one of the most beautiful and unfortunate the other the greatest and most splendid of his age. He was an honored associate of the king of a great country, and yet never renounced that which he considered his proudest title to honor, and by which, in that final end of things in which the truth that is in a man speaks out, he loved to describe himself—"a citizen of the United States."

This was a man who had been an apprentice boy at twelve, a sea officer at fifteen, a captain at twenty-one, who, in a slight, inconsiderable vessel, a small schooner, had rendered most notable service to his chosen country in the face of war vessels of overwhelming force; who, in a cranky, lightly-built sloop-of-war, the Ranger, a year ago, had swept the Irish Channel, terrified the whole western seaboard of England, captured in fair fight a regularly commissioned English sloop-of-war of equal force with and more heavily manned than his own; and all this with a crew of mutineers refusing to obey his orders, and even threatening his life at the last moment before the action.

His hands had hoisted the first American flag that ever fluttered from a masthead, the pinetree-rattlesnake flag, with its motto, "Don't Tread on Me," which seems, somehow, significant to the man himself. The same hand later on had thrown to the breeze the first banner of the Stars and Stripes that ever was seen upon the ocean. His address and resolution had elicited in the way of a naval salute the first official and public recognition of the new figure among the nations of the world from the authorized representative of a recognized government. As a fighter, as a lover, as a diplomat, he was among the first men of his time. He loved glory, and fame, and duty with a passionate devotion, and, as he stated, "ever looked out for the honor of the American flag." He was afterward thanked by Congress, made the head of the American navy, and especially commended in a public letter to the King of France, his friend, a unique honor in our history. Before he died he had participated in "twenty-three battles and solemn rencontres by sea."

A pirate, a traitor, a blackguard this? Nay, as true a man as ever fought for human freedom, as brave an officer as ever overcame heart-breaking adversity, as fearless a sailor as ever trod a heaving deck, and as gallant a lover as ever kissed a lady's hand. In the hundreds of letters written by and to him still extant, many of them on affairs du coeur, there is not a single coarse or rude expression to be found. I sum him up the hero and the gentleman. Not without his faults, of course, which I cheerfully refrain from cataloguing, for that is always a poor business; but they were not great and were counterbalanced by his many virtues.

Look at him now as he approaches the culmination of his career. After his brilliant cruise in the Ranger unable to obtain a decent war vessel, forced to put up with a nondescript antique, a worn-out East Indiaman, the Duc de Duras, now renamed the Bonhomme Richard, which had been filled with old and makeshift guns—ship so rotten that it was impossible to make the necessary alterations to properly fit her for her new service! Attended by a squadron under his nominal command, one of the ships of which, and the best one, was manned largely by British seamen and commanded by an insane coward; at this very moment, previous acts of mutiny were culminating in a flagrant disobedience of orders to follow the Richard into the action! The Alliance, fighting shy of the English war ships, was sweeping toward the frightened convoy, huddling off for shelter under the lee of Scarborough Castle. Another vessel, the Vengeance, French in toto, was fleeing with all speed from the action; and the third, the Pallas, another Frenchman, the only thing American about her being the flag flying above her, hung quivering in the wind in frightful indecision as to whether she should engage the weaker of the two English ships before them.

At this moment the total crew of the Bonhomme Richard (so called from he nom de plume of Benjamin Franklin) was about 300, of which only one-fourth were Americans, about one-half French soldiers, and the balance the riff-raff of all nations, Portuguese preponderating. Two hundred desperate English prisoners were confined below in the hold. Besides the captain, not a single deck officer was left, through a series of mishaps, save Richard Dale, the first lieutenant, than whom no man ever was a better, by the way. Commodore Dale, who has been justly honored subsequently in the United States navy, loved and venerated Jones above all other men, always speaking of him to the last day of his life with his eyes filled with tears of affection and regret as "Paul," which was, in truth, his captain's birth name. Why John Paul assumed the name Jones has never been discovered, certainly for no disgraceful reason, for whatever name he might have taken he would have honored.

The armament of the Richard consisted of twenty-eight twelve-pounders on the gun deck; on the quarter deck and forecastle were eight nine-pounders. In desperation, Jones had cut three ports on each side of the berth-deck, below the main battery, and mounted six old condemned eighteen-pounders therein. His ship had in all, therefore, forty-two guns, twenty-one in the broadside discharging a total weight of 258 pounds of shot. The larger ship of the enemy was the brand-new double-banked frigate Serapis, mounting three tiers of guns, on two covered and one uncovered deck; twenty eighteens, twenty nines and ten six-pounders, making a total of fifty guns, twenty-five in broadside throwing 300 pounds. As a further advantage, the destructive power of an eighteen-pound gun is immensely greater than that of a twelve. The crew of the Serapis was about 350 trained and disciplined men. Her captain, Pearson, was a brave and determined sailor of reputation in the service.

There appeared to be no uncertainty in the mind of either commanding officer as to the character and force of his opponent. Pearson confidently expected an easy victory, which he certainly should have won; and Paul Jones determined to make him fight as no English ship had ever fought before for all he got. About half after seven in the evening the two ships drew within gunshot distance of each other, the Richard rounding to off the port bow of the Serapis. The thirty-two gun ship Pallas at last gathered sufficient resolution to engage the Scarborough, a twenty-gun sloop, and thus eliminated her from Paul Jones's calculations. The Vengeance had fled, and Capt. Landais, in the Alliance, was hovering after the convoy, out of range.

For some reason, as the Richard approached, Capt. Pearson withheld his fire and hailed. The answer, which was indistinguishable, was followed by a shot from the Richard, and the two ships immediately exchanged terrific broadsides. Of the three eighteen-pounders down on the berth-deck near the water line of the Richard, two burst at the first discharge, killing and wounding a large part of their crews and blowing up a part of the deck. The other gun was, of course, abandoned. Side by side, in the bright moonlight of the autumn night, the two ships slowly sailed together for nearly an hour. The roar of one discharge answered the other, cheer met cheer, as the iron-hailed bullets wove a hideous net of death about the two ships.

Fearful that he might be raked astern by the Serapis (which some accounts say was done), Jones, who had kept slightly in the lead, finally threw his ship aback, checking her onward motion so that the Serapis passed slowly ahead of him. As Pearson drew ahead, Jones attempted to throw his vessel across the rear of the English ship to rake and board, which, of course, would have been his best plan, as in that case he could have made good use of the soldiers on his decks. The attempt was a failure on account of the sluggish motion of the unwieldly Richard, which only swung in aft; of and in line with the Englishman. No guns now bearing on either ship, except for the continuous small-arm fire, there was a slight lull in the action. As soon as the Serapis, which had drawn further ahead, swung up into the wind and partially raked the Richard. Jones filled away again, and the battle was at once resumed with determined energy. Pearson now checked the speed of his own ship by throwing all aback, or else wore short around to cross the Richard's bows and rake, and the two vessels slowly drew together again. The fire from both ships had been kept up with unremitting fury from every gun as they bore, but the Serapis's heavier metal had played havoc with the lighter American. The carnage and slaughter upon the Richard had been simply frightful. The rotten old ship was being beaten to pieces beneath the feet of her crew by the terrific battery of the Serapis. Gun after gun in the main battery had been dismounted. At this moment the Richard, fortunately, drew ahead of the Serapis once more, in the game of see-saw they had been playing, and Jones, in a last desperate attempt to close, put his helm hard over, and this time the Richard paid off in front of and athwart the hawse of the Serapis.

The jibboom of the English ship caught in the mizzen rigging of the American. The wind upon the after sail forced the stern of the Serapis round broadside to the Richard, and they lay locked together, the bow of one by the stern of the other, the starboard batteries of both in contact. Pearson had, unknown to Jones, dropped his port bow anchor at the moment of contact, in an endeavor to drag clear of the Richard, which he determined to knock to pieces at long range with his heavy guns; but, as Benjamin Franklin said, "Paul Jones ever loved close fighting," and he saw his opportunity and rose to it then and there. As the two ships fouled each other, with his own hands he passed the lashing which bound them together. He found time at this critical moment to reprove one of his officers for profanity. "Don't swear, Mr. Stacy," said he; "in another moment we all may be in eternity, but let us do our duty."

As the Serapis swung inboard the starboard anchor of the Richard caught in the mizzen chains of the former, and the two ships were bound together in an embrace which nothing but death and destruction could sever. The Englishman's ports on the starboard side had been closed, and he worked his batteries by firing through them, thus blowing off the port lids. The vessels were so close together that the rammers and sponges of the great guns in one ship had to be extended through the ports of the other; they were so close, in fact, that, as they ground and chafed together in the waves the men on the lower decks were actually fighting a hand-to-hand conflict with great guns. But the heavier fire of the Serapis was too strong for the endurance of the half-breed crew of the Richard. The guns below were burst, silenced, and dismounted, and from the mainmast aft the timbers were beaten in and out until both sides of the American ship were literally blown away and disappeared, so that at last the Serapis actually fired her batteries through the open air without meeting any obstruction to the shot. There was really imminent danger that the upper decks aft on the Richard would collapse and sink down into the ruins below—why they did not was a mystery. Dale and a French colonel of infantry had toiled like heroes in the battery to the last, but the carpenter now reported six feet of water in the hold and the ship making water fast, and the frightened master-at-arms at once released the prisoners, crying that the ship was sinking, and the whole assemblage rushed headlong to the main deck, the carpenter and other petty officers in the lead, crying for quarter.

Things had gone better above, however. The heavy mass of men, including the riflemen in the tops of the Richard and the marines under De Chamillard, had simply swept the crowded decks of the Serapis with a searching rain of bullets from their small arms since the moment of contact and before. Nearly every man upon her, with the exception of the undaunted Pearson, had been disabled or driven below; the decks were covered with wounded, groaning and shrieking unheeded, and with dead. Some bold, reckless spirits of the Richard had run along the interlacing yard-arms, and after a dizzy hand-to-hand conflict in mid-air, had driven the English from the tops of the Serapis, and gained possession, whence they poured a bitter musketry fire down the hatchways.

When the ships had come together, the English made an attempt to board. Jones seized a pike, and, followed by a few men, resolutely sprang to the point of attack, whence the British immediately retired. A like attempt of the Americans also failed. As the prisoners and crew came springing up from the useless guns and the decks below, several young American officers implored Jones to strike. He was not of the striking kind. The doctor ran from the cock-pit below, crying that the water was gaining so that it floated the wounded there, and they must surrender.

"What, Doctor," cried Jones, smiling, "would you have me strike to a drop of water? Help me get this gun over."

The doctor concluded that the cock-pit was a safer place than the quarter-deck, and went below again to his ghastly station. The master-at-arms, not seeing Jones, now ran aft to lower the flag. Finding it had been shot away and was dragging in the water, he sprang on the rail, repeating his cry for quarter. Dale and a few determined men were busy below with the pumps, desperately trying to keep the ship from sinking beneath their feet. Jones—first braining with the butt of his pistol the carpenter, who was shrieking that the ship was sinking and also crying for quarter—with unequalled presence of mind, address and resourcefulness, succeeded in quieting his alarmed crew, and then in compelling the confused prisoners to go to the pump on the plea that the English ship was sinking and their own would soon follow if not kept afloat by their exertions. By this means he relieved a number of his own crew, and for the rest of the battle the singular spectacle was presented of a vessel being kept afloat by the people of the very nation against whom she fought. In a lull of the fire, as they came together, Pearson, probably hearing the carpenter or others crying for quarter, shouted: "Have you struck?"

To him Jones returned that immortal answer upon which Americans love to dwell:

"I have not yet begun to fight."

Think of it! On a beaten ship, sinking beneath his feet, kept afloat by the exertions of bewildered prisoners who outnumbered his own weakened, wavering crew, any other man would have struck long since, but Jones had not yet begun to fight! The battle recommenced at once, the English having their own way with their big guns below decks, the Americans equally successful above. With his own hands, assisted by some others, the captain, who had already acted as sail-trimmer, pikeman, and in nearly every capacity as well, dragged another nine-pound gun across the deck with great difficulty and concentrated the fire of the three small guns, loaded with double-headed and grape shot, upon the mainmast of the Serapis. During the contact both ships had caught fire repeatedly from the burning gun-wads or the flame of the close discharges, the Serapis no less than twelve times, and the Richard almost continuously. Dale now turned and fought the fire as gallantly as he had fought the British.

After the two ships had first grappled, about 8 o'clock, the Alliance made her appearance on the scene. Landais sailed slowly across the stern of the two combatants, delivering a raking fire upon both from his starboard guns, which had been heavily charged with grape. More men were killed and wounded on the Richard by this discharge than on the Serapis. Disregarding the warning shouts and signals of the Richard, she then sailed away and repeated her performances upon the two other ships. A few minutes before 10 o'clock the battle between the Serapis and the Richard having continued with the utmost fury during the intervening period, she again crossed athwart the interlocked combatants. Once and again her broadside did more damage to her consort than to her enemy. That was her contribution to the fight.

A little before the last onslaught of the Alliance, by Jones's orders, one of his seamen ran out on the main yard with a bucket of hand grenades, which he deliberately proceeded to light and throw down the main hatch of the Serapis. A number of powder charges had been carelessly allowed to accumulate upon the main deck by the too-confident English, and a fearful explosion took place, which killed and wounded over forty of the crew. About the same time the battered mainmast of the Englishman, upon which Jones had been persistently playing with his small guns, fell over the side, carrying with it the mizzen-topmast as well. That was the end. At 10.30 o'clock Capt. Pearson with his own hand tore down the colors, which had been nailed to the mast by his orders, and surrendered his ship to his thrice-beaten enemy.

Dale, in spite of a severe wound which he had received, but of which he was not yet conscious, so great was the excitement of the battle, at once leaped upon the rail, and, followed by a party of boarders, swung himself aboard the Serapis. As they landed upon the deck of the English ship one of her crew, not knowing of the surrender, dangerously wounded Midshipman Mayrant, Dale's second, with a pike. From beneath their feet still came the roar of the Serapis's guns. Her crew, ignorant of the fact that she had struck, had been cheered to renewed exertions by an English shipmaster, one of the prisoners on the Richard, who had escaped from the pumps and made his way to the lower decks of the Serapis, revealing the desperate condition of their antagonist and encouraging them to persevere, when success would be both speedy and certain. So the English, in spite of their captain, fought on. However, as the fire of the Richard was at once stopped when Pearson tore down his colors, an English lieutenant came up on deck to see if she had struck. When he learned from his commander that his own ship had surrendered he was astounded. He turned to go below, intending to notify the others, but Dale, fearing that he would resume the combat, compelled him to follow his reluctant captain to the deck of the Richard.

There stood the indomitable Paul Jones in the midst of the dead and dying, wounded himself, and covered with blood and the soil of the battle, the Richard sinking beneath him, flames from his burning ship mingling with the moonlight and throwing an uncertain, ghastly illumination upon the scene of ineffable horror presented. Still locked in the deadly embrace of the Richard lay the beaten Serapis, her white decks covered with the mangled bodies of her crew, her lofty masts broken and wrecked, her rigging tangled in inextricable confusion, flames breaking forth from her as well; the sullen English, filing up from below and laying down their arms at the behest of their blood-covered, battle-stained conquerors, completed the picture. It was at this moment that Pearson, handing his sword to Jones, is reported to have made the ungracious remark about the halter. With a magnanimity as sweet to think on as is his valor, Jones replied:

"Sir, you have fought like a hero; and I make no doubt your sovereign will reward you in the most ample manner."

His words were prophetic, for Pearson, though he had lost his ship, was knighted for his gallant defense, and received pieces of plate, &c., for his efficient protection of his convoy. The Scarborough, after a most gallant defense, had struck to the Pallas, and Capt. Piercy, of the English ship, was also substantially rewarded. When Jones heard of Pearson's advancement he characteristically made this remark: "He deserves it, and if he gets another ship and I fall in with him, I'll make a duke of him."

The English Government put a price upon the head of Paul Jones, dead or alive, of £10,000, an immense sum and certainly equivalent to $100,000 to-day. Considering his quality, they rated him cheaply, after all.

What of the fate of the Serapis and the Richard and her captain? It was impossible to save the American ship, though the most strenuous efforts were made to that end. On the 25th of September, therefore, Jones transferred his flag to the Serapis, upon which jury-masts had been rigged, and at 10 o'clock in the morning the brave old Richard, still flying the great flag under which she had fought, sank, bow foremost, beneath the sea. Accounts of the casualties on the two ships differ and are uncertain: it would be safe to estimate those on the Richard as within 150 killed and wounded, and those on the Serapis as within 200. There never was a more bloody and frightful battle fought on any sea. There is no battle on record where the individual personality of one man contributed to the result obtained as much as in this.

The little squadron now made its way to the Texel. Jones was compelled by the Dutch, at the instigation of the English, to either accept a French commission and set the French flag over the Serapis and the Scarborough, or else give up his prizes. To his eternal honor, he chose the latter alternative, and shifted his colors to the Alliance. From the moment he entered the Texel he had not ceased to fly the American flag, even in the face of the overwhelming enemy from whom he was desperately trying to escape.

Commodore Jones died in Paris in the year 1792. He was alone in his chamber at the time, and when his friends found him he was lying face downward upon his bed. The hand of a conqueror whom no human power can resist had been laid upon him, and for the first time in his life the face of Paul Jones was turned away from the enemy.

Two of the Most Thrilling Moments in This Famous Sea Fight.

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"Nearly Every Man . . . with the Exception of the Undaunted Pearson, Had Been Driven Below or Disabled."

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"Some Bold, Reckless Spirits on the Richard, Had Run Along the Interlacing Yardarms, and After a Dizzy Hand-to-Hand Conflict in Midair . . . Had Driven the English from the Tops.

The Naval Treaty.

By Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

(Second Instalment—Conclusion.)

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS INSTALMENT.

Percy Phelps, a trusted employee in the Foreign Office and nephew of Lord Holdhurst, is given an important state document to copy. The paper is stolen from his desk during a few minutes' absence. His anxiety brings on brain fever and he lies delirious for seven weeks at Briarbrae, the home of his fiancee, Miss Harrison, and her brother Joseph. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson hear the story from him in Joseph Harrison's room, which he has occupied.

"God bless you for promising to come," cried our client. "It gives me fresh life to know that something is being done. By the way, I have had a letter from Lord Holdhurst."

"Ah! what did he say?"

"He was cold, but not harsh. I dare say my severe illness prevented him from being that. He repeated that the matter was of the utmost importance, and added that no steps would be taken about my future—by which he means, of course, my dismissal—until my health was restored and I had an opportunity of repairing my misfortune."

"Well, that was reasonable and considerate," said Holmes. "Come, Watson, for we have a good day's work before us in town."

Mr. Joseph Harrison drove us down to the station, and we were soon whirling up in a Portsmouth train. Holmes was sunk in profound thought, and hardly opened his mouth until we had passed Clapham Junction.

"It's a very cheery thing to come into London by any of these lines which run high, and allow you to look down upon the houses like this."

"I thought he was joking, for the view was sordid enough, but he soon explained himself.

"Look at those big, isolated clumps of buildings rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-colored sea."

"The board-schools."

"Lighthouses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wiser, better England of the future. I suppose that man Phelps does not drink?"

"I should not think so."

"Nor should I, but we are bound to take every possibility into account. The poor devil has certainly got himself into very deep water, and it's a question whether we shall ever be able to get him ashore. What did you think of Miss Harrison?"

"A girl of strong character."

"Yes, but she is a good sort, or I am mistaken. She and her brother are the only children of an ironmaster somewhere up Northumberland way. He got engaged to her when travelling last winter, and she came down to be introduced to his people, with her brother as escort.

The conclusion of this Story will be published in to-morrow's SUNDAY WORLD MAGAZINE.